

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 1, 2005

Safeguarding America Against Pandemic Influenza

Today's Presidential Action

Today, President Bush Outlined The National Strategy To Safeguard Against The Danger Of Pandemic Influenza. The President discussed the characteristics of the Avian and Pandemic Influenza threat and the Nation's strategy to detect outbreaks, expand domestic vaccine production capacity, stockpile treatments, prepare to respond to a pandemic, and ensure the health and safety of all Americans.

- **Because A Pandemic Could Strike At Any Time, The United States Must Prepare Now.** Today, the President is requesting \$7.1 billion in emergency funding to begin immediately implementing a national strategy for pandemic influenza. By making critical investments now, the Federal government will strengthen our ability to safeguard the American people in the event of a devastating global pandemic - and bring the Nation's public health and medical infrastructure into the 21st century.
 - **The President's Request Of \$7.1 Billion Will Fund The National Strategy's Critical Goals Of Safeguarding America.** The request includes \$251 million to detect and contain outbreaks before they spread around the world; \$2.8 billion to accelerate development of cell-culture technology; \$800 million for development of new treatments and vaccines; \$1.519 billion for the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Defense to purchase influenza vaccines; \$1.029 billion to stockpile antiviral medications; and \$644 million to ensure that all levels of government are prepared to respond to a pandemic outbreak.
- **To Help The American People Prepare For A Pandemic, The Federal Government Is Launching A New Website.** To equip Americans with accurate information on how to protect themselves and their families, the government is launching www.pandemicflu.gov. This will help Americans stay informed about the government's preparations and learn what they can do to decrease their risk.

The Avian And Pandemic Influenza Threat

Pandemic Influenza Poses A Greater Danger Than Seasonal Flu. Most Americans are familiar with influenza or the "flu" - a respiratory illness that makes hundreds of thousands of people sick every year. For most healthy people, the flu is not usually life-threatening. Pandemic influenza is another matter. It occurs when a new strain of influenza emerges that can be transmitted easily

from person to person and for which people have no immunity. Unlike seasonal flu, it can kill the young and healthy as well as the frail and sick.

- **While There Is No Current Pandemic Influenza Outbreak, There Is Still Reason To Be Concerned.** In the last century, the United States and the world have been hit by three influenza pandemics - and viruses from birds contributed to all of them. In 1918, the first pandemic killed over half-a-million Americans and more than 20 million people worldwide. One-third of the U.S. population was infected and American life expectancy was reduced by 13 years. The 1918 pandemic was followed in 1957 and 1968 by pandemics, which killed tens of thousands of Americans and millions across the world. The recent limited outbreak of SARS gives a hint of the dangers that a modern pandemic would present.

The Federal Government Is Concerned About A New Influenza Virus Known As H5N1 Or Avian Flu. Now spreading through bird populations across Asia and recently reaching into Europe, this new influenza strain has infected domesticated birds like ducks and chickens and long-range migratory birds. In 1997, the first recorded outbreak among people took place in Hong Kong. Avian flu struck again in late 2003 and has infected over 120 people in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia and killed more than 60 - a 50 percent mortality rate. As of now, avian flu is primarily an animal disease and unless people come into direct, sustained contact with infected birds, it is unlikely they will contract the disease.

- **Avian Flu Has Developed Some Of The Characteristics Needed To Cause A Pandemic.** The virus has demonstrated the ability to infect and produce a fatal illness in humans. If the virus developed the capacity for sustained human-to-human transmission, it could spread quickly around the world.

The President Outlines The National Strategy For Pandemic Influenza

The National Strategy Outlines The Coordinated Federal Government Efforts To Prevent And Prepare For Avian And Pandemic Flu. Several months ago, the President directed all relevant Federal departments and agencies to take steps to address the threat of avian and pandemic flu. Drawing on the combined efforts of government officials and the public health, medical, veterinary, and law enforcement communities, as well as the private sector, this strategy is designed to meet three critical goals: detecting human or animal outbreaks that occur anywhere in the world; protecting the American people by stockpiling vaccines and antiviral drugs while improving the capacity to produce new vaccines; and preparing to respond at the Federal, state, and local levels in the event an avian or pandemic influenza reaches the United States.

- **First, The United States Must Be Able To Detect Outbreaks Before They Spread Around The World.** In the fight against avian and pandemic flu, early detection is the first line of defense. A pandemic is like a forest fire: If caught early, it might be extinguished with limited damage. But if left undetected, it can grow into an inferno that spreads quickly beyond any ability to control it. The Federal government is taking immediate steps to ensure early warning of an avian or pandemic flu outbreak among animals or humans - anywhere in the world.
- **The President Has Announced A New International Partnership On Avian And Pandemic Influenza.** This global surveillance and preparedness network will help detect

and respond quickly to any outbreaks of disease. The Partnership requires countries that face an outbreak to immediately share information and provide samples to the World Health Organization. By requiring transparency, governments can rapidly respond to dangerous outbreaks. Already, 88 countries and nine international organizations have joined the effort, and the Partnership's first meeting was recently convened in Washington. The President has requested \$251 million from Congress to help foreign partners train personnel, expand surveillance and testing, draw up and enhance preparedness plans, and take action to detect and contain outbreaks.

- **Domestically, The Administration Is Launching The National Bio-Surveillance Initiative.** This initiative will help rapidly detect, quantify, and respond to outbreaks of disease - and deliver information quickly to local, state, national, and international public health officials. Improved surveillance will help stop, slow, or limit the spread of a pandemic and save lives.

➤ **Second, The Federal Government Will Protect The American Population By Stockpiling Vaccines And Antiviral Medications And Accelerating Development Of New Vaccine Technologies.** One of the challenges presented by a pandemic is that scientists need a sample of the new strain before they can produce a vaccine against it. This means it is difficult to produce a vaccine before the pandemic actually appears. For a pandemic's first several months, there may not be a vaccine. To help protect Americans during these early months when it is possible that no vaccine is available, the government is taking a number of immediate steps.

- **The Government Is Supporting The Development Of New Vaccines.** Researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have developed a vaccine based on the current strain of the avian flu virus. Already in clinical trials, the Administration is planning to stockpile enough doses to vaccinate 20 million people. While not a perfect match, a vaccine against the current avian flu virus would offer some protection and save many lives in the first critical months of an outbreak.
- **The Government Is Stockpiling Antiviral Drugs.** Antiviral drugs like Tamiflu and Relenza cannot prevent people from contracting the flu, but they can reduce the severity of the illness when taken within 48 hours of getting sick. The President is asking Congress for \$1 billion to stockpile enough antiviral medications to help treat the Nation's first responders, those on the front lines, and populations most at risk in the first stages of a pandemic.
- **The Administration Is Working To Strengthen The Vaccine Industry Here At Home So That There Are Enough Vaccines For Every American.** The cornerstone of this strategy is to develop new technologies to produce new vaccines rapidly. The United States must have a surge capacity in place to produce enough new vaccine to immunize every American against the pandemic strain. NIH is working with manufacturers to develop new cell-culture techniques that will bring the pandemic flu vaccine to the American people faster in the event of an outbreak. The President is asking Congress for \$2.8 billion to fund a program to help the Nation's best scientists bring the next generation of technology online. New cell-culture technology should allow manufacturers to create

capacity to produce enough vaccines for every American within six months of the start of a pandemic. The President is also asking Congress for \$1.2 billion for HHS to purchase influenza vaccines.

- **The Administration Is Seeking To Remove One Of The Greatest Obstacles To Domestic Vaccine Production - The Growing Burden Of Litigation.** In the past three decades, the number of American vaccine manufacturers has plummeted as the industry has been flooded with lawsuits. This leaves our Nation vulnerable in the event of a pandemic. Congress must pass liability protection for the makers of life-saving vaccines.
- **Third, The Federal Government Is Working To Ensure That Communities Are Ready To Respond To A Pandemic Outbreak.** Unlike other natural disasters, a pandemic can happen simultaneously in hundreds, or even thousands, of locations simultaneously. A pandemic can continue spreading destruction in repeated waves that can last for a year or more. All levels of government must be prepared for a pandemic.
 - **To Prepare For A Pandemic, All 50 States And Every Local Community Must Have Emergency Plans In Place.** The Administration is working with public health officials and the medical community to develop effective pandemic emergency plans. Secretary Leavitt will bring together state and local public health officials to discuss plans for a pandemic. The President is asking Congress for \$583 million for pandemic preparedness - including \$100 million to help states complete and exercise their pandemic plans before a pandemic strikes.
 - **The Federal Government Is Acting To Ensure Adequate Medical Personnel And Supplies Of Medical Equipment.** In the event of a pandemic, virtually every piece of medical equipment in the country would be in short supply. The Federal government is stockpiling critical medical supplies as part of the Strategic National Stockpile. HHS is helping states create rosters of medical personnel ready to respond, and every Federal department involved in health care is ensuring their capacities are ready to support local communities.

#